JOHN TIMOTHY STONE
MOUNTAINSIDE LODGE DEDICATION
SATURDAY, JULY 14, 2007

What an honor it is to be here today for this important and festive occasion. I represent and bring greetings from two institutions that were important in the life and vocation of John Timothy Stone and which he deeply loved and faithfully served: the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago and McCormick Theological Seminary, also Chicago.

John Timothy Stone served Fourth Presbyterian Church as its Pastor from 1909 until 1930 and McCormick Theological Seminary as its President from 1928 to 1940. I am happy to report that both institutions are alive, healthy and vigorous and I believe, he would be proud of both of them. I am the current Pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church, and in that capacity I am the inheritor of his leadership and the beneficiary of his remarkable vision. I am also the immediate past Chair of the Board of Trustees of McCormick Theological Seminary and I bring special

greetings from the current President of the Seminary, Dr. Cynthia M. Campbell, the faculty and the entire seminary community.

The relationship between the Church and the seminary remains as strong as ever. Faculty members, including President Campbell, are members of the worshipping congregation, teach in the Adult Education Program and the Church recently gave the seminary a one million dollar gift as part of the Seminary's Capital Campaign. I know Dr. Stone would approve of that.

John Timothy Stone, a graduate of Amherst College and Auburn Seminary, the last in a line of Congregational ministers, a Presbyterian Pastor in New York and Baltimore, the Brown Memorial Church, one of the great old Presbyterian Congregations in the East, was prepared by education, experience and temperament for leadership in a new congregation in a new city, Chicago, Illinois, little more than 30 years after the Great Fire and the even greater rebuilding of the city. The early 20th Century was a time of unlimited optimism and self confidence, and Stone was a man of his age. In many ways he reminds me of Teddy

Roosevelt who was strong, robust, courageous and utterly fearless. Roosevelt's biograph wrote [Interesting to note that George Stone, in my oral history interviews with him, says that he thinks of his father as a combination of Teddy Roosevelt and Billy Graham – TR in his robust, hearty, high-energy, outgoing personality and as outdoorman; BG in his evangelical theology.]

When, in 1908, the pulpit committee from the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago contacted him, Stone saw both and opportunity and a challenge. He was 40 years old. The congregation which counted many of Chicago's leading citizens in its membership including the Cyrus McCormick family. But the membership had leveled off and the church was in need of a new life, new vision and new energy. They came to the right man. At first he turned down the pulpit committee from Chicago, daring to suggest that they needed to put themselves to a "larger work and a new and better equipped edifice." Whatever he had in mind the Chicago men knew a leadership opportunity

when they saw it. They met in a downtown bank office two days before Christmas, called a meeting of the congregation for December 27 at which they explained the situation and the challenge. Before the meeting was over, $66,000 had been pledged and Cyrus H. McCormick Jr. rose and said his family would give $1.00 for every $2.00 the other members pledged. McCormick himself traveled to Baltimore with the $100,000 pledge in hand to visit Stone and this time Stone accepted.

It was just the challenge Stone had been waiting for. Two years after his arrival the Congregation launched a building campaign to construct the finest church building west of New York City and hired the premier Gothic architect, Ralph Adams Cram to design it. They purchased property on an unpaved street north of the Chicago River – Pine Street. The other buildings on the street were a tannery, rooming house and M. Donoghue's North Shore Sample Room, a tavern.

Many wondered about such an unpromising site for a grand Gothic building, but what an amazing

decision it turned out to be. Today Pine Street is North Michigan Avenue, one of the most valuable, some say the most valuable, strip of commercial real estate in the nation. The tannery, rooming house and M. Donoghue's tavern are gone and the church's immediate neighbors are the Four Seasons and Ritz Carlton Hotels, Bloomingdales and Macy's.

Stone was an evangelist who saw his ministry first and foremost a communicating the Gospel to individuals and bringing people to faith. The congregation began to grow immediately from 746 to 2,651 when he retired in 1930.

He was that all-too-rare religious leader that combined respect for the people who called him to be their Pastor, a gracious manner of relating to them on their turf, in this case the turf of many well-connected, well-to-do parishioners, and the courage to challenge them. Stone's motto – his most appropriate epitaph was "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." Before he came he challenged the church to expand its horizons, its vision of itself. The fact that today that congregation is the second largest

in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and continues to grow is due, in no small part, to Stone's leadership and compelling spirit that convinced his congregation that they were called to do great things for God.

He challenged them to be generous, to give resources to things that matter in this world – the church, colleges, universities, the YMCA. One time he challenged his wealthy parishioners to give all their money away instead of passing it on to their children. (I wonder how that went over with the children. . .) He challenged the church to stop renting pews – as was the custom in most large urban churches of the day – a system which is by nature discrimination – and he lost the argument. But his vision of the church was a few decades ahead of everyone else.

He established a Board of Deacons to reach out into the neighborhood and care for all needy – and in that act established perhaps the strongest and most enduring tradition at a church which, nearly a century later, lives out its life in service to the city and the world.

He was a compelling preacher in an age that highly valued the pulpit. He was in demand everywhere; spoke on the campuses of 500 colleges and universities. In a survey conducted by the Christian Century Magazine, Stone was noted among the most influential preachers in the world.

His legacy at the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago continues.

He is remembered by way of a special worship space, the John Timothy Stone Chapel, a small, intimate, beautiful chapel which is used everyday as the church staff begins the day with prayer and available for small weddings and Memorial Services.

His vision and courage and big heart are honored every day as the church he loved and lead continues to serve God and its neighbors.

An important part of who John Timothy Stone was is here, in this place. George Stone gave me several chapters of his father's memoir's and I thoroughly enjoyed reading them. He came here first in 1909 – the same year he moved to Chicago to speak at a YMCA student conference. In his own words "I fell quite in

love with the Continental Divide and the grandeur of the majestic view. He built a home on the Old Kirby Ranch, then what he fondly called “Minister’s Hill” which became the sight of many prominent clergy’s summer retreat, all of them his friends, then Mountainside, all the while lending his energy and vision to the YMCA of the Rockies.

In a chapter on fishing he told about a trip which left Estes Park with 12 men - 3 former Moderators of the Presbyterian Church, several college presidents. “What fishing we had!” he wrote and made my mouth water with this description: “What piles of trout we had for breakfast every morning, which, with the flapjacks, appealed to everyone. . . Eggs and bacon were plenteous.”

He captured the heart of the outdoor experience and something close why all of us are here, I suppose.

“After all,” he wrote, “there is nothing more stirring than an open fire in the woods. The smell of fire and smoke, the flip of the beaver’s tail, the distant hoot of an owl, the yap of the coyote, the very aroma of the

woods themselves . . . the comradeship of all. . . The memory will never be erased."

Stone reflected on his Rocky Mountain experience that "a man's soul so expanded that he could go back to his tasks in the city, with clearer vision and nobler soul. I never wondered" he said, "why the Almighty took Moses up on a mountain (Mr. Horeb) to reveal himself to him."

I was also interested in a chapter Stone wrote on Baseball. "I have always loved all kinds of sports," he wrote, "especially baseball." Stone played a little baseball himself, and watched the Chicago Cubs play at the old West Side Grounds, before Wrigley Field was opened in 1914. He describes seeing an unassisted triple play – which for the uninitiated is like seeing a once in a generation appearance of a Halley's Comet. Stone didn't think much of cricket and about our national past time wrote "baseball fills a real place in American life and does a great deal to relieve the tension of city life." I could have written everything in that paragraph except the last sentence, about baseball relieving the strain of city life. I, too, love the game,

have played the game, love watching the game. The big difference between John Timothy Stone and me is that when he arrived in Chicago, the city was the home of the World Champions Chicago Cubs. The Cubs played in and won the 1908 World Series. They haven't done it since and over the years have contributed to the strain of city life, not relieved it. This is a centennial of sorts – and next year is the centennial of the last Cubs' championship. In fact, legendary Wrigley Field opened for the first time in the same week as John Timothy Stone's new Fourth Presbyterian Church opened its doors in May of 1914. The stars are aligning and I'm counting on my distinguished predecessor, my mentor and fellow Cubs Fan to do what he can, to help next year be the YEAR.

There is so much of the John Timothy Stone legacy for which I am grateful. His appreciation for the world of nature, God's good creation; his regular communion with nature, his commitment to be close to nature are important reminders. The intervening decades have not been kind to the world. We have polluted the rivers and the air, we have accumulated and dumped our

waste in the good earth and we have ignored the warnings and advice of our best scientists: we are in the process of reversing a century of enlightened land management and natural preservation in our National Forests: we are handing over to our children and grandchildren a very different world than John Timothy Stone and his generation gave to us. Stone's simple gratitude for the mountains, the trees, the clear streams and the fish in them – and the deeper human spirit that is nurtured by God's good creation are important reminders.

We Presbyterians believe that God has put us here for a purpose: that each of us has a God-given calling and vocation: that regardless of how we earn our living, each of us is called by God to live our lives fully, generously, compassionately, selflessly and in the process making the world a better more human place.

God is honored, we believe when the gift of life – our lives – is not only received, but given back, given away in service to our families, our communities, our nation, the important institutions which make the world better.

That is how John Timothy Stone lived his life.

Fourth Presbyterian Church is better for his having lived and served.

The City of Chicago is better.

The YMCA is better

The world is a better place because of John Timothy Stone.

Thanks be to God.